

On Friday, I visited Twain Elementary School in Wheeling. Twain's school district is home to one of the nation's most innovative student-teacher programs - the Professional Development School (PDS). The PDS initiative was developed by Illinois State University and provides teachers-to-be with an unrivaled learning experience. I'm proud that Wheeling was the first school district to participate in the program which began in 1995.

In Illinois, teachers are required to complete a 16 week student-teacher placement before being granted a teaching certificate. At ISU, students have the option to teach at a PDS for an entire school year. This doubles the amount of time students have in school, allowing them to build stronger bonds with students and become more accustomed to the teaching process.

As a former teacher, I know the importance that educators play in their students' lives. I witnessed two elementary classrooms with interns in action, and I was very impressed with both the curriculum and focus on the students. Wheeling is also the perfect place for such a program – the community's diversity provides unique experiences for the teachers in training.

There are now eight PDS sites throughout central Illinois and Chicagoland. You can read more about the PDS program [here](#).

I would like to thank ISU President Al Bowman for driving up from Normal for the school tour, as well as the teachers, administrators and school board members for District 21.



Congressman Mark Kirk and ISU President Al Bowman with two young students from the Wheeling Professional Development School.





Congressman Kirk visits a classroom with bilingual students with ISU President Al Bowman



Congressman Kirk with the ISU Professional Development School interns, staff and students